Sherry seeks ban on use of plastic covers on books

By Jamal Shahid

ISLAMABAD: Chairperson of Senate Standing Committee on Climate Change Senator Sherry Rehman on Tuesday sought a ban on the growing use of plastic covers on books, calling it an environmentally harmful and dangerously new toxic practice.

"Plastic is a forever chemical which is a huge environmental toxin. It cannot be introduced into our daily lives in a new retail endeavour to keep single use plastics in circulation when the world is discarding it," Sherry Rehman said.

A statement issued here said advocating for her bill during a meeting of the Senate Standing Committee, Sherry Rehman underscored the importance of protecting environment and public health from a toxic new trend of wrapping books routinely in plastic, despite the severe environmental and health consequences associated with plastic use.

She said plastic was known now to be the "forever chemical" that could take up to 1,000 years to fully decompose and was a major contributor to human health crises as well as environmental disasters.

The senator said: "It is a terrible hazard to public health because it chokes our rivers, storm drains landfills and coastlines, leaving more chemical and micro plastics in our food, soil, water and environment than we of the planet can sustain."

She emphasised that booksellers and publishers must take responsibility for discouraging this habit by discontinuing the use of plastic wrapping, and urged authorities to provide a clear and reasonable time frame to book sellers to ensure the complete phase-out of plastic covers. Citing alarming global statistics, she stated that over seven billion tonnes of plastic waste had been generated worldwide, of which only nine per cent had been recycled.

In Pakistan, the situation was even more critical, with only one per cent of plastic waste being recycled, a figure she described as dangerously low.

"If the Senate can give up plastic, then bookshops can do the same," Senator Rehman said, underscoring the need for collective action to protect the environment.

The Senate Standing Committee unanimously passed Senator Sherry Rehman's bill aimed at preventing the use of plastic covers on books, marking a significant step forward in Pakistan's efforts to reduce plastic pollution and promote sustainable practices.

A FARMER prepares ground to allow water to flow into a field in Islamabad's Banigala area. — Photo by Mohammad Asim

Concerns raised in Senate over massive tree felling in Islamabad

Standing committee on climate change set to take up issue tomorrow

By Kashif Abbasi

ISLAMABAD: The controversy surrounding the recent massive tree cutting in the federal capital echoed in the Senate on Tuesday, two days ahead of a meeting of the Senate standing committee on climate change with the issue on top of its agenda.

Raising a Point of Order in the Senate, Barrister Syed Ali Zafar expressed grave concern over the large-scale cutting of trees in Islamabad, warning that the unchecked destruction of green cover posed a serious threat to future generations.

He said that trees are the primary source of oxygen, which is essential for life and forms part of the fundamental human right to a clean and healthy environment. He cautioned that continued deforestation in the federal capital would have irreversible consequences for climate resilience, air quality, and public health.

Recently, trees were cut down in Shakapairan area at a massive level under contesting view, as CDA says only paper mulberry trees were removed while citizens say besides paper mulberry trees of other species were also cut down.

In addition to Shakarparian forest, trees were cut down in H-8 area during construction of a monument while a large number of grown trees were also felled in Chak Shahzad for the construction of a road for a housing society (without public hearing and EIA).

Barrister Zafar rejected the explanation offered by the government that mulberry trees were being cut to address allergy-related concerns, stating that mulberry trees had already been removed long ago and could not justify the current massacre of fully grown trees.

He pointed out that other varieties of trees are now being felled, raising serious questions about the true purpose behind this activity.

He stated that, upon examining satellite imagery and Google maps, it was clearly visible that once-green areas of Islamabad had been stripped of the tree cover, lending credence to concerns that this may be linked to housing schemes and commercial interests.

Calling the situation alarming and unacceptable, Barrister Zafar demanded that the government come clean and present a detailed and transparent report before the Senate, explaining who authorised the cutting, which areas were affected, and for what purpose.

He stressed that parliament must be taken into confidence on an issue of such critical environmental and climate importance.

Minister for parliamentary affairs Dr Tariq Fazal Chaudhry, in his response, claimed that the green texture of the federal capital was not being disturbed, noting that only paper mulberry trees had been cut, which carried serious health hazards.

He said that the facts, which he would present before the House, could be checked through the Google imagery and argued that the trees in the lady one or two years could be checked through it. He explained that the paper mulberry plantation was carried out in 1970s, as it grew and spread fast.

The minister said that at that time there was a need for green texture of Islamabad but no study was conducted with regards to the trees' health hazards. "However, it was found out in early 1990s that most of the pollen allergy and asthmatic cases were caused due to this tree and because of this, its cutting began in 2024 on the orders of the High Court," he noted.

Due to the suo moto notice, taken by the Supreme Court and its order, it was stopped and as per the apex court's direction, a commission was formed, which also fully supported the trees' cutting and as a result 26000 trees were felled and the target was plantation of three against cutting of one such tree.

"So far, 46000 trees have been planted in F-9 Park alone, whereas substitute trees are being planted against cutting done at Shakarparian and related images will be presented in the House," he assured the members.

In view of wide coverage of the matter, he explained that Suparco was invited for satellite imaging of Islamabad a year ago, two years and after trees were cut.

He added that on the orders of the CDA chairman or even the prime minister, not a single road could be built unless it was part of the Master Plan, and same was the case with sectors, private societies and avenues and roads.

CDA takes action against developers for chopping trees

ISLAMABAD: City managers swung into action on Tuesday against alleged illegal encroachment of forest land.

The CDA's environment wing took action against alleged land grabbing in forestland (RF-8) in Bhara Kahu area where private developers, after chopping trees leveled the forest land, measuring over 10 kanals.

"Today, after receiving information about tree cutting in forest land, our team acted immediately and confiscated the machinery of private developers. We got the work halted. Our team imposed fine amounting to Rs7 million against the chopping of around 40 trees and over 100 shrubs," said CDA's spokesperson Shahid Kiani.

He said a case had been moved to the court of CDA's magistrate for collecting fine and taking action against tree cutting and damaging landscaping. A First Information Report (FIR) hsa also been registered with Bhara Kahu police station.

"We are ensuring protection of greenery in Islamabad and strict action will be taken against those involved in tree cutting," Mr Kiani said, adding that with the efforts of CDA overall green cover of Islamabad has been witnessing an increase.

"We have been carrying out tree plantation in Islamabad with a few species of trees in January, and we plan to accelerate our campaign next month. An official of CDA's environment wing said the civic agency had a complete record of all forests, including record sheets of 1902 and 1935, in which the entire area of forest is clearly demarcated. The CDA official said as per its record, the said area fell in RF-8 Bhara Kahu. — Staff Reporter

Court puts ECP on notice in petition against LG polls withdrawal

By Malik Asad

ISLAMABAD: The Islamabad High Court (IHC) on Monday issued a notice to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on a petition filed by Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) challenging the withdrawal of the schedule for local government elections in the federal capital and sought a response by Jan 27.

The matter was heard by Justice Mohammad Azam Khan. During the proceedings, Jamaat-e-Islami Islamabad Ameer Mohammad Nasrullah Randhawa appeared before the court along with his counsel, Advocate Chaudhry Shoaib Ahmed.

The petition challenges the ECP's notification withdrawing the local government election schedule for Islamabad, contending that the move is unlawful and unconstitutional. The petitioner argued that the last local government elections in the federal capital were held in 2015 and that the five-year constitutional term of the local bodies has long expired.

Counsel for the petitioner submitted that under the law, fresh local government elections are required to be held within 120 days of the completion of the term of local bodies. However, instead of fulfilling this constitutional obligation, the ECP withdrew the already announced election schedule, which is against the law, he added.

The court was informed that the ECP had initially announced the local government election schedule on Dec 9, which was later revised on Dec 26, fixing Feb 15 as the polling day.

However, the schedule was effectively rendered ineffective after the promulgation of the Islamabad Capital Territory Local Government (Amendment) Ordinance 2026 by President Asif Ali Zardari on January 10.

The petitioner contended that the ordinance was promulgated with mala fide intent to delay long-pending local government elections in Islamabad. It was argued that the ordinance was issued after the announcement of the election schedule and just days before the commencement of a National Assembly session, despite the absence of any extraordinary circumstances warranting such a step.

Nasrullah Randhawa submitted that the ordinance was unconstitutional and in violation of Articles 17, 32, 89 and 140-A of the Constitution. He further reminded the court that the IHC had earlier issued directions for holding local government elections in Islamabad, which were not implemented, and that even a contempt petition filed in this regard did not lead to any effective action.

The petition requested the court to declare the ECP's notification withdrawing the election schedule null and void and to issue directions for holding local government elections in the federal capital. It was further pleaded that since the main case is fixed for Jan 27, the impugned notification should be suspended till then.

AJK PM orders strict crackdown on food adulteration

By Tariq Naqash

MUZAFFARABAD: Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) Prime Minister Raja Faisal Mumtaz Rathore on Tuesday ordered a strict and effective crackdown against food adulteration across the state, particularly in dairy products and items consumed by children, declaring public health the government's foremost priority.

He issued these directions while inspecting the mobile food testing laboratories established for the Food Department to improve food quality and safeguard public health across the state. Minister for Food Javed Iqbal Budhanvi, Minister for Elementary and Secondary Education Deevan Ali Khan Chughtai, and Minister for Communications and Works Sardar Ziaul Qamar accompanied him during the visit.

Speaking on the occasion, the prime minister affirmed that his government was determined to utilise all available resources to ensure provision of safe and quality food to the people.

"The establishment of mobile food testing laboratories is an essential step towards protecting public health. Such laboratories should also be made fully operational in remote and underdeveloped areas so that the rural population can equally benefit from the facility," he said.

The prime minister observed that although the Food Authority's progress appeared satisfactory in terms of statistics, its enforcement actions should be visibly evident across the length and breadth of the state and should result in a tangible improvement in public health. "Improvement in the quality of food must be ensured at all costs," he said, warning that no negligence or laxity would be tolerated.

He made it clear that adulteration in food items, particularly dairy products including pouch milk, loose milk and yoghurt, would not be condoned under any circumstances. He also directed that food items used by children, especially beverages, snacks and chips, should be checked strictly in accordance with regulations and that an effective state-wide crackdown should be launched.

In view of the approaching month of Ramazan, the prime minister ordered special inspections of food items and called for strict and effective action against those dealing in substandard food so that the impact of the Food Authority's operations was clearly visible. He further stressed that measures for the protection of public health should be made more effective and better coordinated.

Earlier, Secretary Food Sardar Sohail Azam briefed the prime minister on the mobile food testing laboratories procured for the Mirpur, Muzaffarabad and Poonch divisions.

He said the modern mobile units were equipped with advanced instruments, including an Eco Milk Analyzer, oil testometer, moisture analyser and turbidimeter, enabling prompt and effective testing of food items for quality, adulteration and components harmful to human health.

The secretary asserted that the mobile food testing laboratories would play a key role in ensuring the supply of safe and quality food to the public.

With the help of these units, testing of food items prepared and sold at hotels, restaurants, bakeries and other public places would become easier and could be carried out within a short time, thereby strengthening action against adulteration, he said.

Prices fixed by Rawalpindi admin ahead of Ramazan termed unrealistic

Karyana Merchant Association says edibles price list issued without checking rates in wholesale market

By Aamir Yasin

RAWALPINDI: As Ramazan is almost a month away, the district administration issued a new price list for edibles on Tuesday, decreasing the prices of pulses and removing the prices of naan and besan while setting unrealistic prices for milk and meat.

The residents termed the new price list useless because there is no shop in the garrison city selling edibles at these prices. These rates were set in consultation with traders' associations at the deputy commissioner's office through the district price committee.

Strangely, milk is available at Rs220 to Rs240 per litre and curd at Rs240 per kg in the market but the district administration fixed the price of milk at Rs170 per litre for low fat and Rs190 per litre for high fat. Curd price in the open market is at Rs240 per kg while the district administration issued at Rs200 per kg.

Interestingly, the district administration fixed the price of mutton at Rs1800 per kg while beef at Rs900 for the last six months but in the market, mutton is available at Rs2400 per kg and beef at Rs1400 to Rs1500 per kg at all shops.

However, the district administration apparently issued prices of meat, milk and curd on papers only while there is no check in the market despite the presence of a large number of price magistrates and Punjab Enforcement and Regulatory Authority.

On the other hand, Rawalpindi Karyana Merchant Association expressed reservations over the new prices of pulses and said the district administration issued the list without checking the prices in the wholesale market. Currently, Roti is available at Rs15 and Naan at Rs20 to Rs25 in the market, but the administration fixed Rs14 for Roti and removed Naan from the price list.

The rates of pulses in the new official list are: Daal Channa Rs240 per kg for Rawalpindi and Gujar Khan; Rs242 per kg for Taxila, Kahuta and Kalar Syedan.

Daal Moong Rs220 per kg for Rawalpindi and Gujar Khan and Rs222 Taxila, Kahuta and Kalar Syedan. Daal Mash Rs400 per kg for Rawalpindi and Gujar Khan and Rs402 per kg for Taxila, Kahuta and Kalar Syedan. Chickpea price fixed at Rs260 for Rawalpindi and Gujar Khan and Rs262 for Taxila, Kahuta and Kalar Syedan,

The price of rice Basmati old has been fixed at Rs310 per kg for Rawalpindi and Gujar Khan and Rs312 per kg for Taxila, Kahuta and Kalar Syedan. Rice Basmati new price is fixed at Rs290 per kg for Rawalpindi and Gujar Khan and Rs292 per kg for Taxila, Kahuta and Kalar Syedan.

Rawalpindi Karyana Association President Saleem Pervaiz Butt told Dawn that the traders had reservations on the new price list because it did not reflect the ground realities.

"In the wholesale market, Channa (chickpea) is available at Rs260 per kg, Daal Mong at Rs360 per kg and Dal Masoor at Rs250 per kg," he said and added that it will be difficult to sell pulses as per the new list issued by the district administration.

On the other hand, consumers said that there was no check in the market and shopkeepers were selling better quality pulses at high prices while the government had fixed the prices for low quality items only.

Mohammad Khurram, a visitor to Jamia Masjid Road, said that everyone in the garrison city knew that mutton was selling at Rs2400 per kg, beef Rs1400 per kg, milk Rs220 to Rs240 per litre and curd at Rs240 per kg.

"The price list of the district administration is just eyewash, and grocery stores in different parts of the garrison city have fixed small corners where pulses are placed on racks with DC rates. These pulses are not fit for human consumption, while quality products are being sold at higher rates," said Umair Ahmed, a resident of Chaklala Scheme-III.

A senior official of the district administration stated that the provincial government had mandated the implementation of the official price list. Price magistrates will ensure compliance during field visits and that shopkeepers display the official price list prominently.